Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger/Tiago de Oliveira Pinto

Introduction: About the Project "AfricAmericas"

This book presents several stages of a work in progress in Berlin that started with the series of lectures, *AfricAmericas*, in the Fall and Winter of 2004-2005. The series was organized with the support of the Humboldt University (Institute of Romance Languages, Seminar for Africa Sciences), the University of Potsdam (Institute of Romance Languages), the Free University (Latin America Institute), the Brazilian Cultural Institute in Germany (ICBRA), and the Ibero-America Institute, Prussian Heritage Foundation. Nine specialists gave their interpretations of the link between Africa and Latin America, which dates back to early modern history.

These lectures, some of them based on important research already published elsewhere, formed only the beginning of a larger project on cultural exchanges between Africa and America. Several seminars were organized at the Humboldt University, in which basic knowledge of this matter was imparted to students. Thereafter, Flora Veit-Wild (Seminar for Africa Sciences) assumed responsibility for organizing a student excursion with us to Brazil, with a summer school on "Studies on Africa in Brazil and Germany" at the Federal University of Pernambuco in Recife, from March 12-16, 2007. Subsequently, we visited religious centers, like *xangô* and *afoxé* in Recife, *quilombo* movements and villages in the interior of the State of Pernambuco, and finally the home region of *samba de roda* and Candomblé in the sugar cane- and tobacco plantation area of Bahia State – the *Recôncavo* – to get in touch with the dynamics of the African presence in present-day Brazil.

The focus on cultural exchanges across the Atlantic Ocean, between Brazil and Africa in particular, requires breaking through academic boundaries that hold the continents apart and ignore the millions who have gone back and forth for centuries on this main route of the slave trade. This mass movement comprised people from different countries all over the world. Historians disagree about the numbers of enslaved Africans, but diligently reproduce the myriad of maps indi-

cating the sea routes taken by the sailing vessels. That these water masses did not necessarily suppress human contacts has received less attention. The *Imperial Eyes* (Pratt 1992: 1-11), the viewpoint of the colonizer, systematically has neglected the cultural impact of this nomadic move and its "contact zones" on both sides of the ocean.

At present, in the course of the current globalization, this situation is changing rapidly. It was not by coincidence that the series of lectures on *AfricAmericas* was launched in the House of World Cultures in Berlin in October 2004, almost simultaneously with the program *Black Atlantic* (2004), for which Paul Gilroy was responsible. *Black Atlantic* consisted of exhibitions, panels, concerts, lectures, and theater performances. In the eponymous catalogue, Cheryl Finley (2004: 248-263) describes how the "Slave Ship" entered in the visual imagination as an icon since the founding of the Plymouth Committee in 1789 under the leadership of the Quaker Thomas Clarkson. A poster was designed to make a plea for the abolitionist campaign and became famous for showing the overseas transportation of people, as objects for the commercial market. The "Slave Ship" became a theme for poetry in the nineteenth century, when Castro Alves of Brazil, Heinrich Heine of Germany, Pierre-Jean Béranger of France, and John Greenleaf Whittier of the United States wrote about this maritime journey from a more emotional, subjective point of view (Silva 2006). In the twentieth century, anthropology, linguistics, and history increasingly investigate the mutual bonds between Africa and America. In 1993, the UNESCO Slave Route Project places them within a broader framework, whereas references to the slave trade have become a standard issue in cultural studies in academia. Although this issue is mostly discussed in relationship to English- and French-speaking countries, the role of the Portuguese-speaking world is receiving more attention now. Caryl Phillips, for example, in his subchapter on "El Mina: The Encounter" in *The Atlantic Sound* (2000: 128-133), extensively describes the details of the negotiations between the Portuguese deputy Diego de Azambuja and the African king, Caramansa on Saturday, January 20, 1482, concerning the construction of the fortress El Mina on the coast of what is now the Republic of Ghana.

Brazil was the last American country to officially abolish slavery, in 1888. However, as in many other cases, emancipation was not ac-

companied by an infrastructural reorganization that assured the possibility of social mobility of the “free” in Brazilian society. African influences and African cultures were at the bottom of the society’s self-awareness, and this only recently has begun to change. This is documented by the increasing amount of anthologies and critical research on African literatures published in Brazil. It is also promoted by Federal Law 10,639 from 2003, which prescribes that African influences in Brazil, as well as African history in general, are obligatory in the secondary school curriculum. Pioneers like Rita Chaves, Tania Macêdo, Laura Cavalcante Padilha, Carmen Lúcia Tindó Secco, Maria do Carmo Sepúlveda, Maria Teresa Salgado, and Zuleide Duarte have demonstrated that research on African literatures exists. Some of them collaborated on a recent issue of *Research in African Literatures* (2007), edited by Lúcia Helena Costigan and Russell G. Hamilton, and dedicated to literature from Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Afro-Brazil.

In quantitative matters, an important development of the past two decades undoubtedly refers to academic programs devoted to African literatures, history, linguistics, and ethnomusicology. This last field of study saw the most booming increase, observed at different universities with their own ethnomusicology programs. At the third conference of the Brazilian Ethnomusicological Association (ABET) in São Paulo, in November 2006, approximately 200 papers were delivered. At least forty percent of them dealt in one way or another with African and Afro-Brazilian musical cultures. Besides a few colleagues from Africa, this research was delivered by scholars and students living, studying, and researching in Brazil.

One of the forerunners of cultural studies on ***AfricAmerica*** is Alberto da Costa e Silva, a poet and historian, who served as Brazilian ambassador to Nigeria and Benin, as well as to other countries in Europe and Latin America. Silva always concentrates in his research on the links between Brazil and Africa. He published *Um rio chamado Atlântico* (A River Called Atlantic, 2003), a collection of sixteen essays previously published between 1962 and 2002. He analyzes Africa as seen from Brazil and Brazil as seen from Africa. The book also includes reviews of important books on this topic. Silva gave the inaugural address of our summer school in Recife, during which two students of the Humboldt University, **Paul Bräuer** and **Philip Küp-**

pers, interviewed him on the status of Afro-Brazilian cultures in Brazil. This interview, entitled "It is necessary to construct a new type of difference", is reproduced at the beginning of this book. With this sentence, Silva expresses the hope of the possibility to understand ethnic differences as a cultural issue that transcends racial boundaries, so intensively discussed today among sociologists and ethnologists in Brazil.

1. Itineraries

We will not summarize current academic debates on racial boundaries in social life in Brazil in this volume. Instead, our goal is to elaborate historical standards in research and cultural practices in relationship to Africa and America. For that, it is important to take a closer look at specific regularities in this complex transatlantic horizon. The first section is called "Itineraries" to underline our Berlin-based point of departure. In the opening essay, **Flora Veit-Wild** and her collaborator **Anja Schwarz** report about the private archive of Janheinz Jahn (1918-1973), a German specialist on "black" literature from different continents. Jahn collected, analyzed, translated, and interpreted "black" cultures just as interest in "black" literature was emerging in Europe and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. His private archive was acquired by the Library of Asian and African Studies at the Humboldt University. Jahn also broadcast radio programs and performed the poems aloud, paying special attention to rhythm and sound; his work with different media was unique. He left his personal correspondence with many authors, which recalls how complicated it was at that time for authors born in European colonies to integrate local perceptions in writing. In those decades, the clash between the "imposed" European language and the local experiences expressed in other African languages was a crucial point in a writer's' career. Not only in Africa, but also in the Caribbean, did the antagonistic concepts of rhythm, movement, and sounds have traumatic results that stimulated creative processes and new genres.

An illustrative example is Frank Martinus Arion, whose poetry, translated into German, is included in Jahn's *Black Orpheus* (1964: 219). Arion was born in Curaçao, an island in the Netherlands Antilles. The native language is Papiamentu, a Creole language that devel-

oped in close proximity to the slave route between Africa and America. In his first volume of poetry *Stemmen van Afrika* (Voices of Africa, 1957), Arion conceptualizes the "black" *tambu* musical practice in the Antilles within the context of "white" globalization. The enthusiastic reactions in the Dutch press astonished him. One critic even called him the Black Virgil, a qualification that irritated him so much that he decided not to publish poetry in Dutch anymore. He wrote five novels in Dutch instead. In their plots, the local perception versus the "imperial eye" is a crucial dilemma. Arion himself returned to his home island and started supporting institutions for the development and integration of Papiamentu on every educational level.

In the same way, language politics are of utmost importance in many African and Caribbean countries at present. It concerns the delimitation of different perceptions of history and cultures, and Jahn is a pioneer in paying attention to this issue.

Historian **Silke Strickrodt** discusses another move, which was mentioned in Hugo Zöller's report on his visit to Africa in 1884. Zöller was a secret agent of the German government in Berlin in the same year the Congo Conference took place, from 15 November 1884 to 26 February 1885, during which the European countries "divided" Africa among themselves. In his report, Zöller wondered about the "Portuguese" people he observed on the West African Coast and Silke Strickrodt gives an overview of the rich academic research on these Brazilian returnees in the nineteenth century, in many cases after having been brought to America as slaves. They introduced a "Brazilian" style of living in the English colonies, which today still has an impact on daily life.

Visual artist **Christine Meisner** was struck by this lifestyle when she visited Lagos in 2002 and wondered about the Brazilian-looking architecture in this city. She was so intrigued that she developed the video project *Recovery of an Image* (26 Minutes, 2005), in which she reconstructs the story of one of the returnees in the nineteenth century, João Esan da Rocha. He was brought to Salvador da Bahia as a ten-years old child and returned to Lagos as a free man after thirty-one years of domestic slavery on a sugar plantation near Salvador. Meisner also found information about Rocha's life in Salvador, and was encouraged to realize her project in Lagos by a descendent of another returnee family, Tunde Emanuel Balthasar de Silva. The text pub-

lished in this volume is the exact transcription of her video *Recovery of an Image*, a fictional account narrated by a Lagos-born actor and illustrated with Meisner's drawings.

2. Dialogues

One of the important cultures in Nigeria, the Yoruba, has been influential in many regions of Latin America and the Caribbean and is well documented. Much less well known is the long-term and older connection between the Bantu (Angola, Congo) and Portuguese cultures in Brazil. Therefore, all three contributions in the second section of this book discuss this question in-depth as a continuing performance of "Dialogues".

Yeda Pessoa de Castro is a distinguished professor of linguistics at the Federal University of Bahia and has maintained contacts with several German universities. She was one of the first Brazilians to study languages at an African university, earning her PhD at the University of Kinshasa, Lubumbashi campus, in 1974. Besides living in Congo (formerly Zaire), she lived in Nigeria in the 1960s. In her essay, she summarizes her own research on the influences of Bantu languages on Brazilian Portuguese. By pointing out the relevance of these influences, Castro equally makes a plea to set up a project within a broader perspective that comprises Ibero-America as well as the Caribbean.

The Swiss scholar **Martin Lienhard** at Zürich University specializes in colonial Spanish American and Portuguese African chronicles. In his more recent work, he links his historical expertise to the lusophone world in Brazil and Angola. Lienhard edited several volumes on popular cultures on both sides of the ocean and, in the essay included in this book, reconstructs the "dialogue" of the local populations with the colonial expansion in Congo and Angola in Portuguese writings of the seventeenth century. Accordingly, Lienhard succeeds in filling up the so-called "empty spaces", according to which the colonized are not supposed to speak. His analytical readings of some texts of that period enables him to find ways to show that the Africans always conducted an active "dialogue" with the Europeans during colonial expansion.

The next essay “Myths on Early Modernity” follows up on research showing that the Dutch Caribbean was culturally developed as a part of the South Atlantic trade route in the seventeenth century (**Phaf-Rheinberger** 2008). According to historian Luiz Felipe de Alencastro (2000), this development is constitutive of the formation of Brazil in early modern history. Port cities on the Atlantic coast, such as Luanda, Rio de Janeiro, and Recife, have been agencies and their cultural mapping is linked to the concept of *The Lettered City* (1984), coined by the late literary critic from Uruguay, Ángel Rama. For him, it was crucial to connect contemporary expressions of cultural democratization with the patterns inherited from the colonial past, in which the basis was laid for an unequal exchange among the different levels of public life.

The Dutch philosopher Gaspar Barlaeus was one of the *letrados* of this South Atlantic urban network, laying the foundation for understanding its commercial and military goals from the Christian moral viewpoint in Amsterdam. He presented its contours in the volume *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia* (1647) addressing the Dutch occupation of Brazil and Angola. This period is restaged in recent novels from Angola and Brazil that aim to display its long-term consequences and to balance its asymmetric social and cultural impact. From this point of view, the “dialogue” with the past is still a problem for contemporary fictional writers and underlines the overall impression that we are only starting to see its deeper dimensions.

3. Sounds

The term *AfricAmericas* is entangled with the Islamic world, as Silke Strickrodt shows in her essay on the returnees. Such a term merely indicates the importance of a focus and does not imply a theoretically closed-concept. Alberto Mussa, for instance, presented as a Brazilian writer of Arab descent in *ArabAmericas* (Ette/Pannewick 2006), also has an African component that he describes in his prose narrative on Rio de Janeiro. His *O trono da rainha Jinga* (The Throne of Queen Jinga, 1999), resolving the riddles associated with the enigmatic meaning of a *canto*, provides a clue to the organization of the plot, and the importance of this in-depth dimension is touched upon in this third section on “Sounds”.

Studying cultural diversity through music and sound has become a real challenge in Afro-American cultural studies. To deal with this topic, the concept of "soundscapes" is borrowed from Murray Schafer (1976). In the transatlantic world, specific soundscapes emerge and are to be understood as synonymous to a musical landscape in terms of the rich variety of different musical styles and expressions coexisting in a common area or country, in connection with one another or independently. As much as landscapes are characterized by different components and environments, so are the so-called transatlantic soundscapes manifold and diverse. Therefore, when speaking of Brazilian musical structures and contemporary African musical performance production, the authors are referring to single aspects of a complex and factual panorama.

While social sciences have for long limited African cultural presence in Brazil, contemporary studies on music show a much more diverse and broader panorama (Mukuna 1979; 1999; Pinto 2007). The musical dimension always returns as central in studies on the cultural exchanges between Africa and America. This section on "Sounds", starts with a conversation between **Gerhard Kubik** and **Tiago de Oliveira Pinto** about an ethnomusicologist's difficulty in classifying the samba. This genre represents the essence of structural patterns and social meanings in historical terms that evince concepts of a mutual body and sound language that persisted on both sides of the Southern Atlantic Ocean. Kubik and Pinto call attention to the playful aspect of its creative performances, which recall Johan Huizinga's *Homo ludens* (1938). This Dutch cultural historian argued, however, that this playful-performance pattern responds to a pattern of local rules, which always underlie changes and are never static.

Pinto's collaboration with Gerhard Kubik dates back to 1984, when Pinto was conducting field research on music, culture, and religion in the Recôncavo region of Bahia State in Brazil. This research was published in *Capoeira, Samba, Candomblé* (1991) and then elaborated in many essays, lectures, and recordings. "Crossed Rhythms" was first presented as a paper at the LASA 2006 conference in Puerto Rico and summarizes some main points that surface when trying to formulate the African influences on Brazilian musical performances, and on the samba in particular. Kubik's essay is grounded in his personal involvement in jazz-based musical creativity in southeastern

Africa. It is the report on a period of painful transition, from July 2000 to September 2002, in Chileka, Malawi. One of its most eminent musician-composers, Donald J. Kachamba, was passing his art on to the younger musicians he had trained. The essay provides intimate insights into the many ways African-American music of North America, South America, and the Caribbean has inspired local African talent in the twentieth century, giving rise to startling new developments in the twenty-first. As a performer and observer, Kubik possesses the results of meticulous data gathering, especially in the form of diary notes, musical notations, photographs, and audio and video recordings. Most important for him are the human musical mind, the concepts, the burst of ideas, the hidden meanings of word play, and the personal histories of his partners within the larger musical family.

The different layers addressed in the sections “Itineraries”, “Dialogues”, and “Sounds” reflect upon the potential to trace crucial points of the numerous “contact zones” back and forth over the Atlantic Ocean throughout history. They provide subjective insights through interviews, conversations, video tales, visual material, and short summarizing introductions, whereby some essays develop a more academic point of view from the perspective of different academic fields.

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who helped to make this publication possible. In the first place, Ottmar Ette (University Potsdam), who coined the term *AfricAmericas,* and Peter Birle (Ibero-American Institute, PK), always supportive in resolving any practical problem. Flora Veit-Wild “adopted” this project in the Seminar for African Sciences at the Humboldt University, whereas Dieter Ingenschay and Werner Thielemann were sympathetic at the Institute for Romance Studies. Carolyn Vines-van Es carefully revised the English texts. And, last but not least, we are very grateful for the collaboration with Christoph Osterdorf, director of the Cultural Center of Brazil and Germany (CCBA) in Recife, whose diplomacy and permanent interventions made the *AfricAmericas* a project, in which students of the Humboldt University became actively involved and were able to encounter actual research and performing practices in Brazil in March 2007.

The Editors
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